Disabilities Issues Office

Annual Report
2006 - 2007

Manitoba

MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Room 357
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba, CANADA
R3C 0V8

September 2007

His Honour the Honourable John Harvard
Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba
Room 235 Legislative Building
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

May It Please Your Honour:

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Disabilities Issues Office of Manitoba for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Respectfully submitted,

Gord Mackintosh
Minister

Manitoba

Disabilities Issues Office

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September 2007

Honourable Gord Mackintosh
Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities
357 Legislative Building
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister:

I am very pleased to present you with the 2006/07 Annual Report for the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO).

The DIO had another busy year providing advice to numerous government departments on issues ranging from housing development in Waverley West to urgent health care concerns of people with disabilities. Important highlights from the past year are:

- With Treasury Board Secretariat, significant progress was made on creating an Access and Inclusion Lens to help policy developers across government ensure the needs of people with disabilities are addressed;

- With Manitoba Justice, the DIO monitored developments leading to the signing of the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Discussions also began on the Convention's potential impact on Manitoba;

- The DIO worked closely with Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation on the design of the new access ramp which is currently under construction to the front door of the Legislative Building; and,

- Two Round Tables on Disability Issues were held outside Winnipeg – one in The Pas and a second in Morden.

The DIO looks forward to continuing such work in the upcoming year as well as embarking on new initiatives to improve government policies and programs for all Manitobans, including those with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Martin
Executive Director

Disabilities
ISSUES
OFFICE

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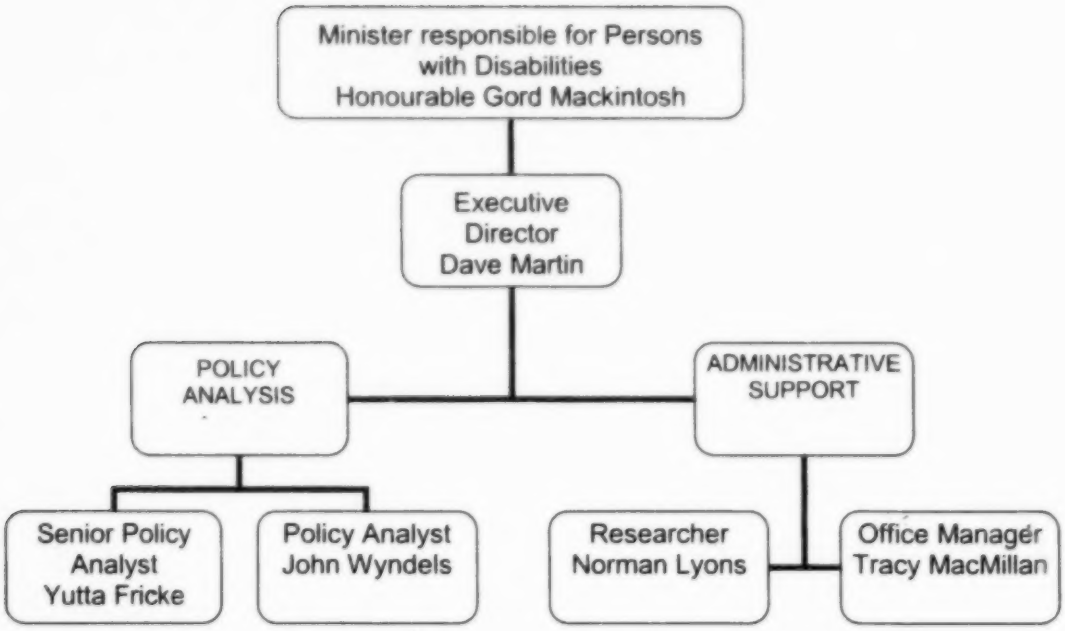
Disabilities Issues Office
Organization Chart

(as at March 31, 2007)



Introduction

The Annual Report of the Disabilities Issues Office is organized to present developments under our primary mission. It includes information about community consultations, improvements to government services, community networking, and significant issues that affect people with disabilities. The report also contains information about the DIO's organization and expenditures. This report is available in multiple formats on request.

Mission and Role

In 2000, the Premier appointed a Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities to:

- identify issues affecting persons with disabilities
- co-ordinate policy development to improve access to public services
- promote positive attitudes and raise awareness about disability
- represent the needs of Manitobans with disabilities to other levels of government

In 2002, the provincial government established the Disabilities Issues Office to serve and report to the Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities. The DIO supports the Minister by:

- communicating directly with members of the community
- organizing community consultations with organizations and citizens concerned about new policy directions
- co-ordinating work among government departments, disability groups, corporate, and community organizations
- making Manitoba a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities

Manitoba's Policy Progress on Issues Concerning People with Disabilities

Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Provincial Strategy on Disability

It has been six years since *Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Provincial Strategy on Disability (2001)* was introduced as the guiding vision for how provincial policies and programs will be designed. Since its release, a number of changes have occurred to provide better service to Manitobans with disabilities. These include improvements to the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) Program, the adoption of policies on access to government buildings and websites, the establishment of programs to support the employment of people with disabilities, and greatly increased consultation with the community on disability issues.

A significant commitment made in *Full Citizenship* was the introduction of an Access and Inclusion Lens to be used during policy development and review. As described in *Full Citizenship*, the lens would be "...a tool for identifying and clarifying issues affecting persons with disabilities used by policy and program developers and analysts to assess and address the impact of all initiatives (policies, programs or decisions) on persons with disabilities.". During the 2006/2007 year, progress has been made on the introduction of this tool.

The DIO has partnered with the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) to create a lens which will become part of the policy development process. TBS has an integral role in reviewing all policies and budget submissions made by provincial departments. The Access and Inclusion Lens will ensure that legislation, policy, programs, and services are reflective of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities.

Full Citizenship also promised Manitobans with disabilities access to government information and services in a way that takes into account any disability needs. The DIO, along with other departmental representatives, is currently in the process of updating the related 1989 access policies. One aim is to integrate technological advances into common government practice. Another goal is to use this policy as a means of educating government and the public on how we can best meet our clients' needs.

A third *Full Citizenship* commitment implemented in the 2006/07 year was an increase in the amount of liquid assets a participant on the EIA Program can possess. In the past year, the Manitoba Government announced that people with disabilities receiving EIA benefits will be allowed to maintain up to $4,000 before their benefits would be affected. This increase doubled the previous maximum of $2,000.

Legislative Building Ramp

The United Nations' International Day of Disabled Persons was established in 1976 to increase public awareness, understanding, and acceptance of people with disabilities. It is a time to celebrate the achievements that have been made, but it also serves as an opportunity to reflect on the work yet to be done to achieve the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all facets of society. Last year, the provincial government marked this important annual event by announcing the construction of a wheelchair ramp at the front of Manitoba's Legislative Building.

Preliminary discussion on the ramp began in October with representatives from several departments, including Infrastructure and Transportation, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and the DIO. Consultations were held with several disability groups to ensure their input and participation in the process. The ramp, which is being built on the west side of the stairs leading to the building's main entrance on Broadway, is being constructed without altering the heritage building's original materials and will continue to reflect the 87 year-old building's classic architectural style.

At six feet in width, the ramp will permit two wheelchairs to pass each other safely and will have level landings every 18 feet along the way. The project includes designating several handicap parking stalls near the ramp, installation of railings, and modern lighting to exceed code requirements, and a garden between the ramp stages with tall grass prairie flowers and Manitoba wheat. There will also be modifications to existing handrails on the front entrance steps to accommodate people with disabilities.

Once completed, Manitoba will be unique in being the only legislative building in the country providing full and equal access to all its citizens at its front entrance. The ramp serves as a real statement of Manitoba's commitment to provide access for all people to their provincial government.

Community Engagement

Rural Round Tables

Since 2002, the DIO has organized annual community consultations on disability issues, called round tables. The goal is to provide Manitobans with an opportunity to share ideas on how to make government policies and programs more effective for persons with disabilities. Rural Manitobans have alerted the DIO that place of residence greatly impacts access to services. In response to their request, this year the DIO decided it was time to hold round tables outside Winnipeg.

In October 2006, the DIO hosted a round table in The Pas, where particular attention was paid to the issues facing Aboriginal people with disabilities. Almost one-third of Aboriginal Manitobans have a disability. The province is concerned that Aboriginal citizens with disabilities receive the services they need, both on and off reserve. A number of people from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation attended this event and contributed to the discussions and resulting recommendations. The two other issues most critical to participants in The Pas were access to services and transportation.

To provide us with a further understanding of the unique circumstances of persons with disabilities living outside Winnipeg, the DIO organized a second round table in Morden in March, 2007. Although the concerns of persons with disabilities in south-eastern Manitoba are different than those in the north, a number of familiar themes emerged, particularly transportation and access to services. Other concerns emphasized by participants were access to inclusive education and recreation. The resounding sentiment from this round table was that these fields must do more to integrate persons with disabilities. Individuals also described the many environmental barriers they face, like brick sidewalks and steps into buildings and houses. The group brainstormed on how to address these barriers, which involved a variety of stakeholders besides the provincial government.

In both Northern and Southern Manitoba, participants reminded government representatives how important it is to meet face-to-face. While the DIO has tried to include rural Manitobans in past round tables with subsidized travel or through video-conferencing, participants appreciated the effort that was made to meet in their community. The hope is to foster a broader understanding in government of the concerns of persons with disabilities living in rural communities.

French-Speaking Manitobans with Disabilities

Consultation with the community is one of the cornerstones of the DIO's operations. With a number of Winnipeg-based round tables behind us, this year we have focussed our attention on Manitobans with disabilities who are less likely to be heard. Sometimes the reason is geographic isolation. Other times language is the greater barrier.

Last year, the province's French Language Services contacted the DIO with concerns about French language services for children with disabilities. Together with the Conseil

communauté en santé (CCS offers Manitobans health and social services), we decided to undertake joint research to understand the extent of the barriers faced by all French-speaking Manitobans with disabilities. Following background research on other jurisdictions, we agreed to use the format of a round table to learn directly about the disability issues affecting our French-speaking Manitobans, both urban and rural. The consultations will take place in 2007/08.

City of Winnipeg Access Advisory Committee

In order to work effectively with the community, the DIO consults and collaborates with a large number of disability organizations in the province. One of the groups it is directly involved in is the City of Winnipeg's Access Advisory Committee (AAC). The AAC is a 12-person committee made up mostly of citizens with disabilities, with a member of the DIO serving as a provincial representative. It was created in 1989 with the priority of "enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to the benefit of all citizens".

Despite the separate city and provincial mandates of the AAC and the DIO, we each benefit from collaboration on common interests. Throughout 2006/07, we continued to work together to promote the issue of visitable housing, including with a forum in October. The DIO also participated in AAC's promotion of the Accessibility Design Standards Manual, which calls for Universal Design in all future development of projects and facilities in the City of Winnipeg. The Province of Manitoba has already adopted Universal Design Standards and is using them to ensure all government owned and leased buildings are fully accessible to all Manitobans.

Emergency Management

The DIO is among a growing group of government and non-government agencies concerned about the inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency management. A number of government agencies and community groups have come together over the past year to plan a consultation that would extend our discussion to a much broader range of stakeholders within Manitoba. Our ultimate goal is to inspire on-going collaboration among Manitoba's disability organizations and emergency responders in the area of disaster preparedness.

Approximately 30 participants representing a broad range of visible and invisible disabilities attended a day-long meeting in the spring of 2007. Academic experts and emergency managers offered the participants the lessons learned from natural disasters in the US and locally. The consistent message was: Preparedness is *the* critical factor in how any of us "weather a storm." This is particularly true for persons who face additional risks, including for reason of disability.

Given the inability of urban, or rural, police, and firefighters to immediately respond to the needs of all persons during a large-scale disaster, disability organizations have an important role to play. By being more informed about emergency management, they can help prepare their members according to their personal needs and they can assist in

communicating with individuals at the time of a disaster. In addition, people with disabilities can also assist emergency managers to learn from their own area of expertise – life with a disability.

Small afternoon working groups each concluded that there was a need for more training – of disability organizations and of emergency managers. There was unanimous interest in creating a network, and enthusiastic plans for follow-up in 2007/08.

Information and Referral Service

Through the course of a year, the DIO handles hundreds of inquiries from people around the province. The calls are usually related to government policy for persons with disabilities. They may relate to a wide variety of personal or community concerns, such as information about application procedures for the EIA Program, or what is the acceptable width of a bathroom door as prescribed under the *Building Code*. Many times the DIO can provide the information required because the call is directly related to our office and the duties it performs. Other times, it will be necessary to refer the caller directly to the office responsible for administering the program. The DIO logs all calls with a record of who called, their query and the action provided.

The calls primarily fit into the following ten categories. They are:

- Housing
- Health Care
- Education
- Employment
- Transportation
- Financial Assistance
- Disability Supports
- Disabilities Issues Office
- Children's Services
- General Enquiries

In 2006/07, the most common queries fall into the areas of Education and Financial Assistance, followed closely by Disability Supports and Housing. The calls are an affirmation of the importance government programs play in the lives of persons with disabilities. They are also an indicator of the broad range of concerns of Manitobans with disabilities.

Significant DIO Issues in 2006/07

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

On March 30, 2007, the Government of Canada participated in an historic ceremony at the United Nations in New York City, where it joined many other countries by signing the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention). This ceremony was the culmination of years of work by UN nation states and disability organizations to develop an international instrument outlining rights for individuals with disabilities. The Convention provides direction to participating nation states in such areas as accessibility, personal mobility, health, education, employment, habilitation and rehabilitation, participation in political life, and equality and non-discrimination.

Signing indicates a country's support in principle for the intent of the Convention. It does not, however, bind the country to its terms in international law. This only happens when a country ratifies the Convention. Thus, although Canada signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the decision to ratify it has yet to be made.

As is tradition with international conventions, the Canadian government consulted with all provinces prior to signing the Convention. Manitoba offered its support for Canada to sign on the understanding that more in-depth reviews would be done before it is ratified.

Like all provinces, Manitoba will now need to consider the possible impact of the Convention on its legislation, policies, and programs. Since the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities implicates numerous provincial departments, such a review will take some time to complete. When finished, Manitoba will provide advice to Canada on issues to consider before a decision on ratification is made. Manitoba Justice and the DIO will play an important role during the province's consideration of the impact of the Convention.

Visitable Housing

Visitability is a movement aimed at changing housing construction practices so that the norm is to provide a basic level of access. Visitability has blossomed from a small movement in the United States, to an accepted global concept that has gained widespread appeal throughout Canada. The provincial government has taken an active role in promoting visitable housing and has begun implementing strategies to advance the concept in Manitoba.

The main features of a visitable house are a level entry into the home, wider doors and hallways throughout, and an accessible washroom on the main floor. Providing basic access has obvious and significant benefits to those with mobility impairments such as wheelchairs. It also serves families pushing strollers, furniture movers, and those with temporary injuries like a broken ankle. By incorporating the three central features of visitability, everyone, regardless of mobility, will be able to enter the home, move around the house, and use the washroom.

To increase awareness about visitability, the DIO participated in a series of seminars on visitable housing, the latest being in the fall of 2006. A broad range of building professionals attended the hands-on event including developers, architects, and engineers. The event provided the participants with a broader understanding of visitable housing and illustrated the long-term benefits derived from homes that include all people.

Manitoba Shelter Benefit Program

In July 2006, the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC) introduced a new shelter allowance to help low-income families, Manitobans with disabilities, and seniors with housing costs. Under the new Manitoba Shelter Benefit (MSB), persons with disabilities living in private rental housing and spending more than 25 per cent of their income on rent will be eligible for the program. In addition, Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) participants with disabilities who live in private rental accommodations will be eligible for a monthly amount through the benefit. To be eligible for the program, individuals must be under 55 and have a disability, a spouse or common-law partner with a disability or an adult dependent with a disability living at home.

Eligible persons with disabilities may receive up to $200 monthly. The total will depend on household income and monthly rent. Individuals with disabilities receiving EIA may receive an additional $35 if they rent their home in a privately-owned building, or $15 if they pay room and board. The additional shelter benefit will not affect the EIA benefits one already receives.

One of the most difficult issues in the lead-up to the launch of the program was the definition of disability. The term disability means different things for different programs and is often interpreted depending on the objectives of a particular program. After much discussion, it was decided that the MSB would define disability as a physical, mental or psychiatric condition that:

- is expected to last one year or more, is continuous or is cyclical, and is likely to recur; and,
- substantially restricts or interferes with a person's ability to:
  - attend to his or her personal care; or,
  - function in the home, community or workplace.

Under the MSB, a person can self-declare as having a disability providing a licensed practitioner supports their claim. The list of licensed practitioners the MSB will accept to verify a disability claim includes practitioners from a broad range of disciplines. People who receive benefits from other sources, such as Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Workers Compensation Benefits (WCB), or Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation (MPIC) may also be eligible for the MSB.

The DIO was actively involved in the development of the MSB. Advice was given to MHRC to ensure that the new program reflected the views of Manitobans with disabilities.

Access to Pressure Ulcer Surgery

Pressure ulcers are one of the most common secondary conditions experienced by individuals with a spinal cord injury (SCI), and carry significant costs in terms of both individual quality of life and health care dollars. In recent years there have been community concerns over the backlog of individuals awaiting surgery to correct pressure ulcers. The long wait list for pressure ulcer surgery is based on the lack of capacity for post-operative beds during the lengthy recovery period following pressure ulcer surgery.

Although persons with SCI are the most at risk of developing pressure ulcers, they do affect other people with disabilities who use a wheelchair or who remain in bed for long periods of time. To respond to the resulting compromised health of those affected, the DIO met with representatives from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) to discuss ways to relieve the pressure ulcer surgery backlog. The WRHA is actively considering several options to accommodate the care needs of pressure ulcer patients in the post-operative phase.

In addition to this long-term treatment strategy, the Department of Health provided the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) with a one-time grant of $100,000 to address the short-term concerns of pressure ulcers. The *Stakeholder Training and Education for Pressure Ulcer Prevention (STEP UP) Project* is a community-based health education and motivation program focused on assisting individuals with SCIs to decrease their risk of developing pressure ulcers through the development and maintenance of protective behaviours.

Financial Report Summary Information

Disabilities Issues Office
(Manitoba Family Services and Housing)
Actual vs. Planned Expenditures
for fiscal year ended March 31, 2007

09-1H Disabilities Issues Office

Expenditures by Sub-Appropriation	Actual 2006/07 $000	FTE	Estimate 2006/07* $000	Variance Over/(Under)	Expl. No.
Total Salaries and Employee Benefits	273.8	4.00	288.8	(15.0)	
Total Other Expenditures	85.8		87.1	(1.3)	

* The 2006/07 Estimate reflects an allocation from Enabling Appropriations for increased salary costs related to the General Salary Increase.

Disabilities Issues Office
(Manitoba Family Services and Housing)
Actual vs. Actual Expenditures
for years ended March 31, 2006 & March 31, 2007

Estimate 2006/07	Appropriation	Actual 2006/07	Actual 2005/06	Increase/ (Decrease)	Expl. No.
288.8	Salaries and Employee Benefits	273.8	258.1	15.7	
87.1	Other Expenditures	85.8	86.9	(1.1)	

Disabilities Issues Office
Five-Year Expenditure and Staffing Summary by Appropriation
($000's)
For the years ended March 31, 2003 - March 31, 2007

		Actual/Adjusted Expenditures*									
		2002/03		2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07	
Appropriation		**FTE**	**$**	**FTE**	**$**	**FTE**	**$**	**FTE**	**$**	**FTE**	**$**
09-1H-1	Salaries and Employee Benefits	3.00	57.1	4.00	180.7	4.00	214.6	4.00	258.1	4.00	273.8
09-1H-2	Other Expenditures		43.1		80.6		86.2		86.9		85.8
Total Disabilities Issues Office		3.00	100.2	4.00	261.3	4.00	300.8	4.00	345.0	4.00	359.6

* *Adjusted figures reflect historical data on a comparable basis in those appropriations affected by a reorganization, during the years under review.*